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ABSTRACT

Based on Charles Dickens' novel "Great Expectations," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand the differences between totalitarianism and democracy; and a that a writer of a story considers theme, plot, characters, setting, and point of view. The main activity of the lesson involves students working in groups to write a short story, in a serial manner much like Dickens did when he wrote "Great Expectations." It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

Great Expectations

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two to three class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Kelley Devine, an English teacher at Thomas S. Wootton High School in Rockville, Maryland.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. The differences between totalitarianism and democracy.

2. A writer of a story considers theme, plot, characters, setting, and point of view.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

access to a photocopier

the book, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens

PROCEDURE:

1. Give students the following background as a lead-in to a group project—collaborating on a short story:

> Dickens wrote his novels in installments published in newspapers. Then he would listen for feedback from his readers. They would let him know if they liked the direction in which the story was progressing or whether they wanted the story to take another turn or a character to behave differently. Then he would rework his ideas for the next chapter to reflect his audience's opinions. Only then would he publish his next chapter.

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2. Assign students to work together in pairs. Tell students that, in pairs, they are going to participate in a "group write." The pairs will work serially—that is, one pair following another—to produce a short story that treats one of the following **themes**, or generalizations about life, from Dickens's *Great Expectations*:

- the importance of loyalty (loyalty to family or to friends)
- the power of love
- the importance of acting sympathetically toward those who are less fortunate
- the need for reform in educational and legal systems

The class may also suggest an alternative theme from the novel, beyond the four suggested above. The point is that the entire class is going to work together on one short story with an agreed-upon theme.

3. Go over with the class the other important elements of a short story besides its theme:

- The **plot** is the sequence of events that occur in the story. The plot begins with a narrative hook; must involve a problem, or conflict, that the main character faces; builds to a climax, or point of highest interest; and then shows the main character solving the problem and learning something about life.
- The **characters** are the individuals in the story. A short story may have one or a few main characters and one or a few minor characters.
- The **setting** refers to the time and place in which the story occurs. Often, a short story (as opposed to a novel) has only one or a few settings.
- The **point of view** is the angle from which the story is told—first person by the narrator or third person by someone outside the story.

4. In a minilesson, teach or review with students the prewriting phase.

- Having already chosen a theme, the class must now agree on a plot that will showcase showcase the selected theme. In asking students to come up with a plot, remind them that people usually write best when they write about what they know—the world they live in every day. Let them brainstorm ideas and then settle on one plot idea for their group story.
- Next, ask students to brainstorm and come up with at least two main characters to inhabit the plot—one character who confronts the problem, and another character who helps get around the problem. When they come up with possible characters, ask them to fill in a chart with information on each character's age, size, outstanding features, clothing, personality, and characteristics of speech and behavior.
- Third, ask students to imagine when and where the characters exist, jotting down, on another chart, details about time of year, historical period, locale, and weather.
- Next, ask students to concur on whether to use "I" or a third-person pronoun in their story.
- Generate an outline that students can refer to when they're ready to draft their communal story. Here's one such outline:

beginning

Introduce the main character.
Tell where the character is.
Start the plot: what happens first?

middle

Explain the main character's problem.
Introduce other characters as necessary—perhaps in a new setting. Use dialogue as appropriate.
Move the plot along by telling what problems the character or characters run into. Build suspense.

ending

At the point of highest interest, tell what your character or characters do.
Tell what the characters' action leads to.
Tell what the final outcome is.

5. Explain now how the next stage of the process—writing, based on the prewriting notes—will progress:

- You will select one pair of students to write, jointly, the first paragraph or several paragraphs.
- You will then select a second pair of students, who will add one or several paragraphs to move the story along.
- You will then select a third pair—and so on. Instead of writing one or several paragraphs of the narration per se, a pair may contribute the contents of a diary or letter that is important to the plot.
- With one exception, all the students in the class will take turns writing until the story is through. The exception is the pair of students you will designate as editors; their contribution will come later in the writing process.

Although the students will be following the prewriting notes about story basics, each pair will have a chance to build on or change the direction of the story with new input. To keep the entire class involved in how the story is progressing, make sure that you or a student reads the ongoing draft aloud to the class periodically.

6. After every pair of students except the editors has had a chance to contribute to the story, and all writers are satisfied with the story, give them a chance to come up with a title for the story. Allow the writers some time away from the manuscript.

7. Then with the entire class, run through the key points to remember about revising and editing. You might share with students a checklist such as the following:

CONTENT

Does the text clearly present a character facing the problem, lead up to a solution, and always indicate reactions by characters in the story?
Does the story show rather than merely tell?

STYLE

Is the writing smooth?
If there is dialogue, is it realistic?
If there isn't dialogue, should there be some?

GRAMMAR, USAGE, MECHANICS

Have you checked to make sure capitalization, spelling, and matters such as agreement, comparison, and pronoun references are correct?
Turn a photocopy of the manuscript over to the two students who will act as editors. Let them apply the editing checklist, above, to the draft.

8. The editors may make changes on the photocopy itself, or they may suggest in notes how they think the writers themselves should revise the story. Regardless of who does the revision, chances are that at the end of the revising and editing process you want a clean draft of the story to distribute to the class for their journals.

9. Give students a chance to discuss the pros and cons of developing a story by committee, given that the plan of one author may be overridden by a later author.

ADAPTATIONS:

Encourage students to participate in this activity by giving them permission to write as little as a single sentence when their turn comes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Analyze Pip's reaction to the criminal in the cemetery. Discuss what you would do if you were in Pip's situation. Would you report the criminal to the proper authorities or would you do the same thing Pip did? Why?

2. Discuss the role Miss Havisham plays in the novel. Some have said she represents an imprisoned state of mind. What does this mean, and do you agree that this is an apt description of Miss Havisham?

3. In *Great Expectations*, Pip's foster father, Joe, comes to visit Pip in the city. They are distant and Pip is embarrassed by Joe even though he realizes all that he has done for him. Analyze a time in your own life when you were embarrassed by a family member. How did it make you feel before, during, and after the incident? Do you think Pip was justified in feeling this way?

4. Many people in your life have expectations of you. Compare the expectations that you have of yourself to others around you. What do your friends, boyfriend, girlfriend, parents, and teachers expect from you? How are these expectations similar to or different from the ones you have of yourself?

EVALUATION:

Writing and editing a collaborative story do not lend themselves to evaluation of students on an individual basis. Use this lesson, instead, to help students develop by consensus their own criteria for evaluating the final short story. On a scale of 1-3 with 3 being highest, what qualities must a story have to merit a 3? a 2? a 1?

EXTENSION:

Director's Cut
Dickens changed the ending of *Great Expectations* prior to publishing it in the form your class has read. In addition, one movie version uses another ending. Ask students, working in small groups, to come up with yet another ending for the novel.

"Class" of 1861
Dickens uses Pip's trials and tribulations in the novel to make clear his own hatred of the class system. Ask students to use the video and other resources to write an essay about the class structure that existed in England in the 1860s. Advise them to support their generalizations with examples.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Bleak House
Charles Dickens, London, Mandarin, 1991
The obscure case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, in which an inheritance is gradually devoured by legal costs, the romance of Esther Summerson and the secrets of her origin, the sleuthing of detective Inspector Bucket, and the fate of Jo the crossing-sweeper—these are some of the lives Dickens invokes to portray London society, rich and poor, as no other novelist has done.

David Copperfield
Charles Dickens, Oxford, Clarendon Press; New York, Oxford Press, 1981
Written in the form of an autobiography, it tells the story of David Copperfield, growing to maturity in the affairs of the world and the affairs of the heart—his success as an artist arising out of his sufferings and the lessons he derives from life.

WEB LINKS:

The Dickens Project
This site promotes the study and enjoyment of the life, times, and works of Charles Dickens.
http://humwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/index.html

The Dickens Page
This is an outstanding tribute to Dickens. It contains links, organizations, images of Dickens. There are several sections that can supplement the study of Dickens and his works.This site promotes the study and enjoyment of the life, times, and works of Charles Dickens.
http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Dickens.html

Charles Dickens
This is a fun site that allows the student to do investigative work on Dickens by collecting information from other sites.
http://www.west.net/~cybrary/Dickens

Dickens House Museum
This is a wonderful interactive site that takes the learner on a tour of Dickens' home.
http://www.rmplc.co.uk/orgs/dickens/index.html

VOCABULARY:

epic
Extending beyond the usual or ordinary especially in size or scope.
Context:
The journey of Philip Pirrip from the shadows of society up to its dizzying heights is an epic one.

aristocracy
A governing body or upper class usually made up of an hereditary nobility.
Context:
He was awed by the stately homes of the aristocracy and encouraged by his father, a Royal Navy clerk, he dreamed of a grand future for himself.

parliament
An assemblage of the nobility, clergy, and commons called together by the British sovereign as the supreme legislative body in the United Kingdom.
Context:
Almost immediately, he began to make a name for himself reporting parliamentary proceedings for the Daily Press.

recluse
A person who leads a secluded or solitary life.
Context:
Pip is introduced to a different sort of prison altogether when he's invited to play at the house of Miss Havisham, a rich recluse who has locked herself away from the world.

smitten
Affected deeply with great feeling.
Context:
Not surprisingly, Estella wins the game, and with it, Pip's undying love. He is completely smitten.

benefactor
One who makes a gift or bequest.
Context:
He announces that Pip is to receive a small fortune from a benefactor who wishes to remain anonymous.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates a familiarity with selected literary works of enduring quality.

Benchmarks: Demonstrates an understanding of why certain literary works may be considered classics or works of enduring quality and substance. Demonstrates a familiarity with a variety of classic American, British and world literature and their authors.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: reading

Standard: Demonstrates competence in general skills and strategies for reading literature.

Benchmarks:
Relates personal response to the text with that intended by the author. Understands complex dialogues and analyzes the stylistic effect of those dialogues on a story. Analyzes the effects of complex literary devices on the overall quality of a work.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: behavioral studies

Standard: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development.

Benchmarks:
Understands the punishment for "unacceptable" social behavior depends partly on beliefs about the purposes of punishment and its effectiveness.

Understands that people often take differences to be signs of social class.

Understands that family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, institutional affiliations, socioeconomic status, and other group and cultural influences contribute to the shaping of a person's identity.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: world history

Standard: Understands the causes and consequences of the agricultural and industrial revolutions from 1700-1850.

Benchmarks: Understands the realities and romanticized visions of pre-industrial England. Understands how industrialization shaped social class and labor methods.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: world history

Standard: Understands major global trends from 1750 to 1914.

Benchmarks:
Understands major shifts in world population and urbanization in this era and how factors such as industrialization, migration, changing diets, and scientific and medical advances affected worldwide demographic trends.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
Part fairy tale and part horror story, "Great Expectations" is a harsh tableau of London's stratified Victorian society. Follow the life of the boy called Pip, whose dreams begin to unravel as he learns the true cost of becoming a gentleman.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ▶

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
Great Expectations

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are two powerful insights that Dickens writes about in his novel *Great Expectations*?

2. How are Pip's and Dickens' own lives similar?

3. When did Charles Dickens begin his own career as a writer and for whom did he work?

4. What is a feature or theme that is repeated in Dickens' writings?

5. What was the most desirable and prestigious position anyone could have in London at this time?

6. What was Pip doing before learning of his inheritance?

7. What is the pivotal point in the novel?

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Great Expectations

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What are two powerful insights that Dickens writes about in his novel *Great Expectations*?
The plight of the orphan trying to find parents and the rottenness of the British people's worship of class are two powerful insights that Dickens writes about in his novel Great Expectations.

2. How are Pip's and Dickens' own lives similar?
Like Pip, Dickens' own childhood harbored dark secrets such as problems with family and poverty.

3. When did Charles Dickens begin his own career as a writer and for whom did he work?
At the age of 15, Charles Dickens began his career as a writer by reporting parliamentary proceedings for the Daily Press.

4. What is a feature or theme that is repeated in Dickens' writings?
Prison is a feature that is repeated in Dickens' writings. In Great Expectations, prison is represented as both a place and a state of mind.

5. What was the most desirable and prestigious position anyone could have in London at this time?
Being a member of the leisure class was the most desirable and prestigious position in London at this time period. This class did not work or contribute any value to society.

6. What was Pip doing before learning of his inheritance?
Pip worked as a blacksmith prior to learning of his inheritance.

7. What is the pivotal point in the novel?
The pivotal point in the novel is when Pip turns on his foster father, Joe.

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